

Politics in the Middle Ages

Brief #1

Focus

The Middle Ages is a period of time that bridges the ancient and modern worlds.

The Middle Ages is a period of time that links the ancient and modern worlds. In order to better study this thousand-year expanse of time, scholars divide it into three parts:

- The Early Middle Ages: about 476 to 900
- The High Middle Ages: about 900 to mid 1200s
- The Late Middle Ages: mid 1200s to 1500

The Roman Empire, which fell in 476 A.D., was invaded by groups of different people called the Germanic Tribes. These groups of people lived in communities all over the continent of Europe. Some of the Germanic tribes were called the Vandals, the Visigoths, the Angles, and the Saxons.



Charlemagne

One of the Germanic tribes was called the Franks. In 771, the King of the Franks was Charlemagne. He ruled over a huge kingdom which covered the areas of France, Germany, Italy, Austria, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxemburg.

During Charlemagne's reign, the arts, literature, and architecture flourished. Charlemagne was a great believer in education and scholarship, although it is believed that he was illiterate.

Charlemagne was also a devout Roman Catholic. When the Franks invaded and conquered new territory and people, they converted the people to Christianity.

After Charlemagne's death in 814, other tribes began to invade and take over parts of his kingdom. But Charlemagne is still considered to be one of the most influential kings of the Middle Ages. Charlemagne is buried in a Roman Catholic cathedral in Germany.

Vocabulary

1. Charlemagne
2. Franks
3. Normans
4. Norman Conquest
5. William the Conqueror
6. Magna Carta

Fast Fact

Charlemagne set up schools, opening them to peasants as well as nobles.

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Brief #1 (cont.)



William the Conqueror

The Normans were a tribe of people who lived in Normandy in France. They were descendants of the Vikings from Scandinavia. They were Christians and practiced many Frankish customs and traditions. In the 11th century, their leader was a king named William. In 1066, the Normans invaded England. They won a battle at a town called Hasting. The Normans became the new rulers of England, and William became the first Norman king of England. This event is called the Norman Conquest, and William is known as William the Conqueror. He is also known as William I.

Before the Norman Conquest, England was ruled by the Scandinavians. Their king was Harald III. The Norman Conquest of England changed the course of English history. It meant that England was now more closely aligned with and influenced by European culture, as opposed to Scandinavian.

William died in 1087. He is buried in France.

Fast Fact

The Normans introduced castle building to England.



The Magna Carta

John was the king of England in 1199. He was not a strong leader, and his rule was often unfair. He believed that the fact that he was king gave him the right to do whatever he pleased.

In 1215, the ruling class, or barons of England, got angry with King John and the way he was running the country. The king needed to keep in good standing with these barons. They were the ones who paid the taxes. And it was the barons who raised armies when the king wanted to go to war.

In June of 1215, King John met with the barons at a town called Runnymede. At this meeting the king agreed to the provisions set out in a document called the Magna Carta. The Magna Carta is a collection of 63 clauses or statements about the rights of the barons, ordinary people, and the limits of the power of the king. *Magna Carta* means "great charter" in Latin.

The Magna Carta states that the king may not take a person's property or demand money from them unless they agree to it. It also establishes the rule of habeas corpus. *Habeas corpus* means that the king can't have someone thrown in jail unless they have broken the law. In other words, the king can't imprison someone just because they may not like a person or because a person disagrees with them.

The Magna Carta is a very important document. It is the foundation of many legal systems in the world, including the United States Constitution.

Europe in the Middle Ages

Activities



Generic Activity

Create a Newspaper: Create a newspaper about the civilization(s) that you are studying. Make sure your paper includes news stories; fashion, food and entertainment news; a word search or crossword puzzle; a comic strip; and a classified section.

Note to Teacher: If possible, students should use computers.



Brief #1—Politics in the Middle Ages

- **Make a Map:** Create a map which shows the extent of Charlemagne's kingdom.
- **Create a Pamphlet:** Create a six-paneled pamphlet about the Germanic Tribes. Select four of these tribes and describe where and how they lived. Make sure to differentiate between East and West Germanic Tribes.
- **Draw a Diagram:** The Normans introduced castle building to England. Research a particular Norman Castle from the 11th or 12th century and draw a detailed diagram that illustrates the different parts of the structure.
- **Write a Newspaper Account:** Pretend you were an imbedded reporter at the Battle of Hastings. Write a news article about the battle.
- **Complete a T-Chart:** Using a T-Chart, compare and contrast the Magna Carta to the United States Constitution.

Keywords: Charlemagne, Kingdom of the Franks, Germanic Tribes, Battle of Hastings, Medieval Castles, Magna Carta, United States Constitution



Brief #2—Social Structure in the Middle Ages

- **Make a Poster:** Make an informational poster that illustrates the social strata of Feudalism in the Middle Ages.
- **Reenact:** Research the oath of loyalty (fealty) that a vassal had to swear for a lord. Reenact this ceremony for the class.
- **Recreate an Emblem:** Different guilds in the Middle Ages had emblems that represented their trade or craft. Select a particular medieval guild, and then research their emblem. Using an old sheet or a piece of fabric, recreate this emblem. Be prepared to explain the symbols on the emblem.
- **Listen:** Gregorian Chants developed in monasteries in the Middle Ages. Listen to some of these Medieval pieces of music.
- **Write a Research Report:** Knights in the Middle Ages lived by a Code of Chivalry. Research this code and write a two-page report on what it was and how it was practiced.

Keywords: feudalism, fealty oath, guilds and emblems, Gregorian Chants, Code of Chivalry